



Lata Mangeshkar, an artist who recorded songs in over 36 Indian languages and became a true gem of the emerging music scene in Bombay, lived in Peddar Road at her home in Prabhu Kunj. She moved here in her early thirties when she was known for her rare and pristine voice, recognisable by every admirer of Bollywood films. Her legacy grew due to her dutiful contribution to the music industry, singing major hits which soon garnered a national and international audience. She was also known for her gentle demeanour. Her humility is perhaps a testament to humble years of early life.

The Indore state of formerly British India was the birthplace of the revered singer. On 28th September 1929, a girl was born to parents, Shevanti and Deenanath. They called her Hridaya, although she was formally named Hema (Bhimani 1995, 140). Her father, Deenanath Mangeshkar, originally hailing from the village Mangeshi in Goa, was a Marathi and Konkani classical singer and theatre actor in Indore. Deenanath once asked one of his students to practise a raag. However, the student made a mistake. His daughter, who was playing nearby, corrected the boy. Deenanath recognised her talent for singing. The father-daughter duo were also great fans of the maestro K. L. Saigal, which resulted in a childhood enriched with experiences in music.



Lata Mangeshkar and her Sister Asha Bhosle (Source: Asha Bhosle's X Account)

From age five, she started acting in the theatrical plays of her father. A character from one of these plays, Latika, inspired her father to change her name to Lata. After Lata, four children followed, younger sisters Meena, Asha, Usha, and brother Hridaynath. On not being allowed to take her younger sister to school, Lata decided to leave formal education.

Her struggles started during her childhood when she lost her father at the age of thirteen. Being the eldest of five siblings, she had a family to feed in 1942. A friend of her father tried to offer stints as a singer and actress through roles in Marathi films. However, she was not happy with acting in films. She recorded her first song in 1942 for the Marathi film Kiti Hasaal, but it never made it to the final edit.

In 1945, the family moved to Bombay. At a time when society was yet to witness a good number of working women, Lata entered the scene bearing a simple saree and two plaits (Green 2019). Taking lessons in Hindustani Classical Music initially from Ustad Amaan Ali Khan of Bhindi Bazaar Gharana and later music director Ghulam Haider, she continued singing and performing minor film roles. She faced rejection at first because her voice was too thin (Vinchi 2022), but this allowed her to carve out a niche for herself.



Lata Mangeshkar (Source-Hindu Photo Archives)

A turning point came in 1949 when the 20-year-old sang “Aayega Aanewala” for the film Mahal. At a time when playback singers did not receive credit in films, listeners of Lata began to pester All India Radio to reveal her identity. The song opened several doors for her. She went on to record songs in Hindi, Telugu, Tamil and even Sinhala, but this time with her name in the credits (Green 2019). Working with experienced music directors, she became an artist in her own right. In 1960, the family moved from Walkeshwar to Peddar Road, where she bought her apartment in a housing society named Prabhu Kunj, which remained her residence until the last few years of her life (Mishra 2023).

As her career continued to advance in the 1950s and 1960s, an opportunity presented itself in 1963. There was a request to sing before the then Prime Minister of India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. The song was none other than “Aye Mere Watan Ke Logon” known to have moved the Prime Minister himself to tears.

Lata Mangeshkar worked with music composers like the Burmans, Shankar-Jaikishan, and Laxmikant-Pyarelal. She also ventured outside the Bollywood music scene and proved her versatility through Rabindra Sangeet compositions, ghazals, bhajans, khayals, devotional songs, and many more (Sanyal 2018). She said, “Music was within me. I was full of it”, which reflected in all her performances (Sanyal 2018). Her career spanned nearly eight decades, lending her voice to generations of leading actresses of Bollywood such as Meena Kumari, Asha Parekh, Mumtaz, Hema Malini, Rekha, Madhuri Dixit, Sridevi, Jayaprada, Jaya Bhaduri, Zeenat Aman, Juhi Chawla, Kajol, Raveena Tandon and many more.

She received several Filmfare awards for the Best Playback Singer, but in 1969, she gave up the award to make way for new talent. Fondly known as Didi or elder sister by all, she became the Voice of the Nation. Nasreen Munni Kabir, who interviewed Lata Mangeshkar for her book, described her as a private person, willing to share her world with those she knew well. She also said that she was supported warmly by her family and friends, including Pandit Narendra Sharma, a poet held in high regard by Lata Mangeshkar.



In 1974, Lata Mangeshkar became the first Indian singer to perform at the Royal Albert Hall in London. From 1975 to 1998, she took the Hindi film music show to esteemed stages, performing across the United States and Canada. She also received three National Film Awards, 15 Bengal Film Journalists' Association Awards, the Filmfare Lifetime Achievement Award and many more. She was also given the prestigious Dadasaheb Phalke Award in 1989.

In 1985, Lata Mangeshkar performed at a charity show in Toronto, raising over \$150,000 for a charitable organisation, which she wholeheartedly donated to. On 5th March 2001, she sang "Aye Mere Watan Ke Logon" to aid victims of the Earthquake in Gujarat (The Times of India 2001). Lata Mangeshkar, alongside her brother and musician Hridayanath Mangeshkar, came together to establish the Deenanath Mangeshkar Hospital and Research Centre in Pune, inaugurated by the Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee (Isalkar 2022). These philanthropic endeavours exemplify her commitment to supporting various social causes and making a positive impact on society.

In 2001, Lata Mangeshkar earned the highest civilian honour of the country, the Bharat Ratna. She was also the only Asian to receive the Platinum Disc from EMI, London (Sanyal 2018). The government of France conferred on her its highest civilian award, the Officer of the Legion of Honour, in 2007. She composed and wrote songs under the pseudonym "Anandghan" and launched her music label, LM Music, in 2012. Her last song was released in 2015 at the age of 85 years.

Lata Mangeshkar, also regarded as the Nightingale of India, passed away at 92 years of age on 6th February 2022 (Jagran 2022), a day after Vasant Panchami, a festival dedicated to the Hindu Goddess Saraswati who represents music and knowledge. Singing across eight decades and championing the Hindi film music show abroad, Lata Mangeshkar has left behind a legacy of music that will resound for years.

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